

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SY-05 SCCT-01 AID-05 /062 W

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4101

INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 9076

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ASEC VE

SUBJECT: LEFTIST LEADER'S DEATH CAUSES FUROR

REF: CARACAS 9024

1. SUMMARY. AN INTERIOR MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ADMITTED JULY 26 THAT LEFTIST LEADER JORGE RODRIGUEZ DIED FROM PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT AND SAID THAT FOUR DISIP OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN DETAINED FOR SUSPECTED COMPLICITY IN RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. FISCAL GENERAL (ATTORNEY GENERAL) MEDINA HAS PROMISED A FULL INVESTIGATION INTO THE INCIDENT. RODRIGUEZ WILL BE BURIED JULY 27 AND DEMONSTRATIONS PROTESTING RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH ARE EXPECTED. INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE HAS REVEALED THAT MEP DEPUTY SALOM MEZA AND INDEPENDENT DEPUTY FORTUNATO HERRERA ARE IMPLICATED IN THE NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING AND THAT STEPS WILL BE TAKEN TO LIFT THEIR PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY. HERRERA HAS PROCLAIMED HIS INNOCENCE OF THE CHARGE AGAINST HIM. MEP ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD SEEK LEPAGE'S RESIGNATION AND MAS HAS CALLED FOR DISIP'S REORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY.

2. AN INTERIOR MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ISSUED LATE JULY 26 ADMITTED THAT LEFTIST LEADER JORGE RODRIGUEZ, WHO WAS DETAINED BY GOV SECURITY OFFICERS JULY 23 ON SUSPICION OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE KIDNAPPING OF WILLIAM NIEHOUS, DIED IN POLICE CUSTODY JULY 25

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FROM PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT. THE COMMUNIQUE STATED THAT

RODRIGUEZ, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE, DIED IN THE HANDS OF DISIP AGENTS "WHO REMOVED HIM FROM THE PLACE WHERE HE WAS DETAINED WITHOUT THE AUTHORIZATION OF THEIR SUPERIORS." IT ADDED THAT FOUR AGENTS, BRAULIO GUDINO, JUAN ALVAREZ DIAZ, GUILLERMO ZAMBRANO, AND ITAMAR RAMIREZ, HAVE BEEN ARRESTED FOR SUSPECTED COMPLICITY IN RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. IN CONCLUSION, THE STATEMENT SAID THAT THE GOV "CONDEMNS EVERY ILLEGAL ACT AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS AND, IN THIS PARTICULAR CASE, WILL LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED TO ENSURE THAT THOSE WHO HAVE ENGAGED IN ILLEGAL CONDUCT RECEIVE APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT FOR THEIR ACTS."

2. FISCAL GENERAL JOSE RAMON MEDIAN TOLD THE PRESS JULY 26 THAT THE AUTOPSY PERFORMED ON RODRIGUEZ SHOWED MARKS OF VIOLENCE AND THAT RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH WAS "PRESUMABLY CAUSED BY PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT." MEDINA STATED THERE WOULD BE A FULL INVESTIGATION INTO RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH AND ADDED THAT "EVERY LEGAL RECOURSE WILL BE EXHAUSTED IN THE PROCEEDINGS TO UNCOVER WHAT TRANSPRIED."

3. SOCIALIST LEAGUE LEADERS REMOVED RODRIGUEZ'S BODY LATE JULY 26 TO THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY (UCV) CAMPUS WHERE A PROTEST MEETING HAS BEEN SCHEDULED FOR TODAY, JULY 27. RODRIGUEZ IS TO BE BURIED IN THE EAST CEMETERY THIS AFTERNOON. UCV STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT PASTOR HEYDRA HAS CALLED FOR A THREE-DAY NATIONAL STRIKE AND STREET DEMONSTRATIONS TO PROTEST RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. SOCIALIST LEAGUE PRESIDENT CARNELO LABORIT ANNOUNCED JULY 26 THAT DELCY GOMEZ RODRIGUEZ, THE DECEASED'S WIDOW, AND LEADERS OF THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE WILL PREFER PRIVATE CHARGES AGAINST PRESIDENT PEREZ, INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE, AND THE DIRECTORS OF DISIP, DIM, AND THE PTJ.

4. IN ADDITION TO INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REFTEL, INTERIOR MINISTER OCTAVIO LEPAGE IN HIS JULY 26 PRESS CONFERENCE REVEALED THE NAMES OF THE TWO DEPUTIES ALLEGEDLY IMPLICATED IN THE NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING. THEY ARE MEP DEPUTY SALOM MEZA ESPINOZA AND INDEPENDENT DEPUTY FORTUNATO HERRERA (SEE CARACAS 5610 AND 7044). HE INDICATED THAT THE GOV HAS INITIATED THE LEGAL PROCEDURES BY WHICH THEIR PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY CAN BE REMOVED. LEPAGE STATED THAT TWO MEMBERS OF THE GROUP THAT ABDUCTED NIEHOUS, DAVID NIEVES AND IVAN PADILLA BRAVO, HAD BEEN ARRESTED EARLY JULY 21 FOLLOWING AN ATTEMPT BY AN INTER-
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MEDIARY OF THE NIEHOUS FAMILY TO PAY A RANSOM FOR NIEHOUS' RELEASE. LEPAGE SAID THE POLICE SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED THAT THERE WERE TWO COORDINATORS, NIEVES AND RODRIGUEZ, OF THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE KIDNAPPING. ON JULY 23 THE POLICE DETAINED RODRIGUEZ AND SEVERAL OTHER SUSPECTS, AMONG THEM FRANCISCO CEDENO LUGO, JUAN RAFAEL MEDINA FIGUEREDO, BERNICE RONDON ANDRADE, SARA GODOY RON, LILIAN FRIAS AVENDANO, ORLANDO BARRIENTOS, JUAN RAFAEL MEDINA FIGUEREDO, CRUZ MANUEL

MORENO, MARISOL LAPREA, AND ANA ELVIRA PEREZ. TWO OTHER SUSPECTS, FERNANDO SOTO ROJAS AND CARLOS LANZ RODRIGUEZ, HAVE NOT YET BEEN DETAINED. IN ANNOUNCING THE DEATH OF JORGE RODRIGUEZ, LEPAGE CALLED THE INCIDENT "PROFOUNDLY PAINFUL" AND "UNPLEASANT." HE SAID HE HAD IMMEDIATELY INFORMED THE FISCAL GENERAL UPON LEARNING OF RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH JULY 25. LEPAGE SAID THE FOUR DISIP OFFICIALS IMPLICATED IN THE INCIDENT HAD EXPLAINED THAT THEY HAD REMOVED RODRIGUEZ FROM HIS CELL IN THE BELIEF THAT HE COULD SHOW THEM THE PLACE WHERE NIEHOUS

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WAS BEING HELD. LEPAGE THEN REPEATED PRESIDENT PEREZ'S GUIDELINES FOR GOV SECURITY OFFICIALS WHICH STATE THAT NO SECURITY OR POLICE OFFICIAL IS TO ACT BEYOND THE LAW AND TAKE UPON HIMSELF THE PREROGATIVE TO EMPLOY VIOLENCE AGAINST ANYONE. LEPAGE SAID THAT AN INTENSE POLICE OPERATION HAD BEEN UNDERWAY SINCE JULY 24 TO ROUND UP THE REMAINING KIDNAPPERS BUT THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT WHAT WOULD BECOME OF NIEHOUS.

5. ENQUIRIES BY THE PRESS JULY 26 DETERMINED THAT DEPUTY SALOM MEZA WAS OUTSIDE OF CARACAS IN THE STATE OF GUARICO. DEPUTY FORTUNATO HERRERA ATTENDED LAST NIGHT'S CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES SESSION AND STATED THAT HE WAS WILLING TO WAIVE HIS PARLIMENTARY IMMUNITY AND COOPERATE WITH THE POLICE IN THEIR INVESTIGATIONS. HE ASSERTED HIS INNOCENCE OF THE CHARGE AGAINST HIM SAYING THAT HE HAD ACTED AS AN INTERMEDIARY WITH THE KIDNAPPERS THREE MONTHS AGO WITH THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF

INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE.

6. FOLLOWING AN EMERGENCY MEETING JULY 26 OF THE MEP NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, MEP SECRETARY GENERAL JESUS PAZ GALARRAGE CALLED RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH A "POLITICAL CRIME" AND LABELLED INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE'S ACCUSATIONS AGAINST MEP DEPUTY SALOM MEZA AS A "SMOKE SCREEN TO TRY TO OBSCURE THIS CRIME." PAZ INDICATED THAT MEP WOULD SEEK LEPAGE'S RESIGNATION AND THE SOLIDARITY OF ALL THE OPPOSITION PARTIES

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IN THE STRUGGLE TO "PRESERVE DEMOCRATIC RULE." MAS DEPUTY RAFAEL GUERRA RAMOS OPENED THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES' DEBATE JULY 26 ON RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH BY CALLING FOR A THOROUGH REORGANIZATION OF DISIP AND THE PUNISHMENT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. GUERRA'S PROPOSAL WAS SUPPORTED BY MEP, MIR, URD, AND THE PCV, WHILE THE OPPOSITION COPEI PARTY WILL STATE ITS POSITION TODAY. AD SECRETARY GENERAL LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ, WHO WAS INTERIOR MINISTER FROM MARCH 1974 TO JANUARY 1975, CALLED RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH "REGRETTABLE AND UNJUSTIFIED."

7. COMMENT.

THE HEAVY HANDED APPROACH OF GOV POLICE AUTHORITIES, WHILE MOVING THEM INEXORABLY CLOSER TO THE CONCLUSION OF THE CASE, HAS ALSO GIVEN THE MATTER A NEW DIMENSION AND RAISED A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS. THE ROLLING UP OF THE INTERMEDIARIES (CARACAS 8835) OF COURSE DESTROYED TERRY CANAVEN'S ROLE AS A GO-BETWEEN AND RAISED THE DANGER LEVEL WITH REGARD TO NIEHOUS' SAFETY. IT IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT THE KIDNAPPERS HAD TO BE AWARE OF THE FATE OF THEIR ASSOCIATES. IN ADDITION, THE UNFORTUNATE DATE OF JORGE RODRIGUEZ AND THE NUMBER OF ARRESTS MADE ARE BOUND TO HAVE AT LEAST THREE MAJOR EFFECTS:

A. IT RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF RETALIATION BY THE KIDNAPPERS WHETHER AS A QUID PRO QUO OR AS A MEANS OF ATTEMPTING TO TRADE OFF FOR THEIR CAPTURED COMRADES;

B. IT INCREASES THE PRESSURE ON THE KIDNAPPERS TO FLEE THEIR PRESENT LOCATION WHICH LEAVES NIEHOUS' SAFETY SUBJECT ONLY TO THE "GOOD WILL" OF HIS KIDNAPPERS;

C. IT GIVES THE CASE A POLITICAL TONE WHICH ALWAYS HAD EXISTED IN POTENTIAL BUT HAD NOT EMERGED UNTIL NOW.

8 THE DISCLOSURE BY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE NAMES OF THE TWO DEPUTIES IMPLICATED CAN ONLY BE

CONSIDERED A MEASURE OF DESPERATION IN ORDER TO DEFLECT
THE CRITICISM RIGHTFULLY ANTICIPATED BY THE GOV. WE
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CONSIDER THIS DISCLOSURE PREMATURE AND ARE NOT AWARE OF
ANY BUT CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE THAT MAY BE ADDUCED
AGAINST THEM. WE HAD EVERY INDICATION THAT BOTH DEPUTIES
WERE ADEPT AT ESCAPING FROM OFFICIAL SURVEILLANCE.
WHILE NO DOUBT THE GOV WILL BE ABLE TO MOBILIZE ITS
OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE CONGRESS, IT WILL BE
DIFFICULT TO COUNTER ALLEGATIONS THAT THE MATTER WAS
TRUMPED UP TO DIVERT PUBLIC OPINION FROM WHAT CAN ONLY
BE CONSIDERED AN UGLY STAIN ON THE GOV'S HUMAN RIGHTS
RECORD.

9. COMING INTO QUESTION WITH REGARD TO THE MISSION
IS OF COURSE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MINISTRY OF THE
INTERIOR IN CONNECTION WITH THE CASE. OUR CONTACT WITH THE
MINISTRY IS IN SUSPENSE. THE TDY TECHNICIAN HAVING COMPLE-
TED HIS CONSULTATION IS LEAVING TOMORROW. THERE ARE NO
UNFULFILLED SPECIFIC REQUESTS PENDING FROM THE MINISTRY
AND WE INTEND TO TAKE NO FURTHER INITIATIVES. WE WILL,
OF COURSE, EVALUATE ANY FURTHER SPECIFIC REQUESTS IF WE
RECEIVE THEM. OBVIOUSLY, FOR THE TIME BEING, WE WISH
TO AVOID ANY IDENTIFICATION WITH VENEZUELAN LAW
ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES ON THIS CASE. SECONDLY, WITH
STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS ALREADY UNDERWAY AS OF THIS
WRITING WE CAN REASONABLY EXPECT THAT AT SOME POINT WE
MAY BECOME A TARGET. APPROPRIATE SECURITY PRECAUTIONS
HAVE BEEN TAKEN.

10. ESSENTIALLY, WE BELIEVE THAT THE DIE HAS BEEN CAST
BY THE VENEZUELAN AUTHORITIES AND THAT THERE IS LITTLE
WE CAN DO AT THIS POINT TO INFLUENCE THE COURSE OF
THE INVESTIGATION. ULTIMATELY, THE SUCCESSFUL
CONCLUSION OF THE CASE WILL DEPEND ON THE LEADS DEVELOPED
FROM THOSE CURRENTLY UNDER ARREST. DESPITE THE MINISTER'S
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROTESTATIONS CONCERNING NIEHOUS'
SAFETY THE GOV TRACK RECORD SO FAR WOULD LEAD US TO THE
CONCLUSION THAT THEIR APPROACH IS LIKELY TO BE DIRECT
AND BLUNT. END COMMENT.

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